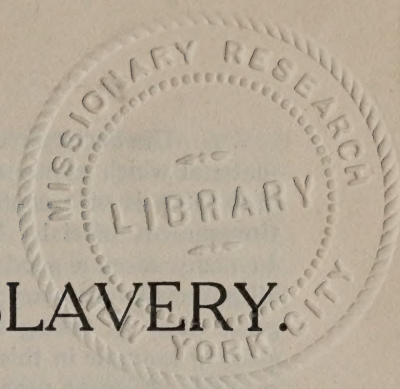


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THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.

THE League of Nations having appointed a Commission to report upon Slavery and its abolition, the following APPEAL has been addressed to the League by the Committee of

THE ANTI-SLAVERY AND ABORIGINES PROTECTION SOCIETY.

20th May, 1925.

To :—

The Secretary-General,
League of Nations,
Geneva.

SIR,

On behalf of the Committee of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, we beg leave to ask that the following representations may be laid before the Slavery Commission of the League of Nations.

METHODS.

1. The ordinary procedure of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society when allegations are received is as follows :—

It is the invariable practice of the Committee when charges, after careful examination, appear to be of a substantial nature, to approach, privately in the first instance, the Company or the Administration against which the allegations are made, and to urge the importance of adequate and impartial enquiry.

In the case of a Company, if this procedure fails, the Committee then approaches the Administration responsible for the government of the country concerned. Where allegations are made against a Government, and the private appeal fails, steps are taken to interest Members of Parliament. The third method, namely, an appeal to public opinion to bring pressure to bear upon the responsible parties, is only adopted in the last resort,

Anti-Slavery.....

2. The Society receives from different parts of the world a mass of material which requires and receives careful sifting. By far the larger proportion is of a confidential nature, emanating from past or present Government officials, Missionary Societies, merchants and travellers. In many cases a good deal of enquiry about the informant and the allegations is necessary before any action can be taken, and this means great delay in taking steps to secure enquiry and redress. The most striking example in this respect was in connection with one of the worst scandals of recent years, in which the Society was only able to secure action being taken after nearly three years from the first receipt of the information. During that period a large number of people were subjected to murder, rapine and torture, which might have been largely stopped had prompt action been possible.

3. The experience of the Society is that in the cases investigated by its Committee, while the allegations of abuses (in some instances exaggerated), have proved to be well-founded, there is always a reluctance to carry out an enquiry by those responsible. In so far as cases of oppression, or scandals taken up by the Society are concerned, it cannot recall any case—certainly not in recent years—where it has been proved to have acted precipitately or unjustifiably. It is therefore deplorable to reflect upon the volume of suffering which could have been prevented if the initial representations of the Society had been regarded as a “friendly act,” and prompt enquiry made. If the Slavery Commission of the League of Nations could devise some machinery whereby charges as to the existence of practices which have in them the elements of slavery in some form or other could be the subject of prompt and impartial enquiry when they appear to be well-founded, an enormous service would be rendered to native races.

SCOPE OF ACTIVITY.

4. The allegations which form the major part of the Society's material to-day, in so far as they affect the question of slavery, relate to :

- (a) Contract Labour.
- (b) Forced Labour.
- (c) “Adoption,” “Pledging,” and Domestic Slavery.
- (d) Slavery.

ABUSES OF PERSONAL LIBERTIES.

5. British Secretaries of State have always held that any system in which force or fraud are exercised to secure control of the labourer for private ends partakes of slavery, and an acceptance of this principle by the League of Nations would be most helpful.

6. (a) Abuses connected with the Contract System which require redress include contracts forced upon unwilling workers, the insertion in the contracts of false descriptions of the conditions, false dates, compulsory extension of contracts, failure to explain the terms to the illiterate worker, the treating of purely civil breaches of law as criminal offences, days computed by tasks and not by hours of labour, and the withholding of pay.

7. (b) The Society is receiving information and complaints that the system of Forced Labour gives rise to the utilisation of Government machinery to enforce the supply of labour for private persons by means of excessive taxation, the bribing of Government officials to supply labour, and the exercise of tyranny and even cruelty by petty officials in districts remote from supervision. Further indirect methods of compulsion are—systems of registration, the taking of finger-prints, speeches by Government officials and Magistrates upon the duty of working for white employers, "Squatters'" arrangements, "puppet" chiefs, whose main duty is recognised to be that of coercing labourers—all these methods, some of which appear innocent in themselves, being employed to reinforce by administrative authority, sometimes tyrannously employed, the inadequately attractive power of wages offered to labour. The Society holds that it is no part of the duty of an administrative official to recruit labour for private interests.

8. The late Lord Cromer laid down the following proposition with regard to the employment of forced labour :

"The answer to the question, what we mean by slavery? is that we reluctantly admit the necessity of compulsory labour in certain cases, and that we do not stigmatise as slavery such labour when, under all possible safeguards against the occurrence of abuses, it is employed for recognised and indispensable purposes of public utility. On the other hand, we regard the system when employed for private profit, as wholly unjustifiable and as synonymous with slavery."*

To this definition the Society strongly adheres, namely, that in no circumstances should the Government of a country depart from its true functions of administration in order to compel labourers to work for *private interests*, because such labour is, in our view, undoubtedly a form of slavery.† Where Government commandeers labour for public works, adequate steps should be taken to provide clothing, medical attention,

* Lord Cromer, in the *Spectator*, February, 1914.

† It is interesting to note that in the Report of the East African Commission just presented to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Commissioners say: "We would like to make it clear at once that under no circumstances could the British Administration tolerate in any form the principle of compulsory native labour for private profit, be the employer native or non-native."

and suitable housing accommodation, coupled with transport to and from the homes of the labourers. There are several well-known cases where lack of attention to these elementary considerations has led to deplorable consequences. In addition to this, the labourers should be told definitely the purpose for which they are engaged, the period of service expected of them, and the rate of wages to be paid.

9. The claim to impose compulsion in order to obtain labour for administrative purposes derives its title from the indigenous custom of calling out labour at times of disaster, or for primitive works of public good, such as native paths, bridges across streams, and so forth. There is, however, great need to circumscribe modern demands based on this root title. Under native custom the Chief would never call out labourers to an extent, or for a place, which would interfere with the domestic requirements of the tribe, nor would the labour be called out for long periods, or in circumstances which would separate the worker from his family. This demand as applied to-day in the case of railways or bridges of modern construction frequently takes the labourers hundreds of miles from their homes for extended periods, separates them from their families, and gravely interferes with the domestic and economic life of the community. Our Society is of the opinion that it might be possible to persuade Governments to restrict the demands for such labour to a limited distance from the home of the tribe, to require such labour only at seasons when there is no harvest to gather—and even then, for a much more limited period than is the usual practice.

“ADOPTION” AND SYSTEMS OF DOMESTIC SLAVERY.

10. (c) A recent example of “adoption” until lately existed in Hong Kong, also in some parts of Malaya, whereby parents transferred their children for money payment to another household, usually for so-called domestic service. Such a system leads to serious abuses, and, in the case above-named, was closely connected with a regular traffic in girls to and from the Colony.

11. It is known that for some years the British Government has felt a good deal of concern as to conditions in the hinterland of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Lord Milner, when Secretary of State for the Colonies, took an active personal interest in the matter, but very little publicity has been given to the question. The Governor of Sierra Leone, Sir A. R. Slater, has, however, announced his intention of issuing a report upon the subject, since, in his speech on the occasion of the opening of the 1924-25 Session of the Legislative Council of Sierra Leone, he said :

“ In my first address to the old Legislative Council I expressed my conviction that the present system of domestic slavery needed investigation ‘ as to

whether it was not one of the local conditions which hinder rather than help Sierra Leone on its road to prosperity.' In the two years that have since elapsed the problem has received very careful examination, and before very long I hope to lay before you certain important correspondence on the subject, giving the results of the investigations, and the conclusions I have formed. For the moment I can only assure you that no precipitate or drastic change need be apprehended and no change will be introduced without first giving this Council full opportunity for expressing its opinion."

Akin to this practice is that of pawning children for debts, which has occurred in many parts of the world and is alleged to exist to-day in a British Protectorate.

SLAVE-OWNING AND SLAVE-TRADING.

11. (d) The Society is from time to time receiving allegations upon slave-owning and slave-raiding in Abyssinia, the Sudan, Kenya Colony, and other parts of Africa, Persia and Arabia. Most of the reports containing these allegations have been forwarded to the League of Nations, published in the Press, or dealt with in the British Parliament.

SUGGESTED REFORMS.

12. The Committee of the Society would respectfully urge upon the Slavery Commission of the League of Nations the fundamental importance of two things: (1) the necessity of defining as a broad principle what practices may be said to-day to amount to modern slavery, and it is suggested that this is covered by the proposition of Lord Cromer, which we have already quoted. (2) Of endeavouring to secure an international convention covering the main principles which should govern the employment of coloured workers, with, if possible, some system of periodic inspection. We venture to suggest a few of these, which, if adopted, would, in the opinion of the Society, bring about far-reaching improvement in the conditions of native races.

13. CONTRACT LABOUR.

(a) That single mining and agricultural contracts might be for a maximum period of six months and one year respectively.

(b) That contracts with illiterate persons and miners should be countersigned by a Magistrate or other Government official, whose duty it should be to satisfy himself that the terms are understood by all parties to the contract.

(c) That breaches of these civil contracts should be treated for all parties as civil offences.

(d) That "deferred payments" of wages should be paid into some public fund uncontrolled by interested parties.

(e) That education should not be prejudiced by demands made upon them to work on plantations.

(f) That the Protectors of Labourers should be appointed, so far as possible, from territories from which the labour force is obtained, thereby securing officials with a working knowledge of the language of the labourers.

(g) The prohibition of the Truck system, whereby labourers are frequently involved in such heavy debts that they are unable to change their employers.

14. SLAVERY.

In British law, acts of slave traffic by British subjects are offences wheresoever committed, and the guilty parties are liable to trial and sentence whensoever they return to countries within British jurisdiction. We attach hereto a copy of the Act in question.

15. We are unaware whether this feature of jurisprudence is an element in any country other than Great Britain, but the passage of a similar law by other nations could not fail to have a healthy effect in certain countries, because it would place in the hands of the official representative, authority to warn his fellow-subjects of the consequences which might follow the pursuit of local practices.

16. Most of the information in the possession of the Society has been forwarded, as received, to the League of Nations, but efforts are being made to obtain a fuller disclosure of details in the possession of the British Government, and in the course of a Debate in the House of Lords on May the 13th, Lord Cecil was authorised to say, on behalf of the Government, that if the Council of the League express any desire for more complete information, or information in any different form to be given them, any request of that kind would receive the most sympathetic consideration on the part of His Majesty's Government.

17. The Committee of the Society is prepared, if desired, to arrange for a representative of the Society to be present in Geneva during the sittings of the Slavery Commission, in order to reply to any question, or to amplify any matter included in this communication.

We have, etc.

TRAVERS BUXTON,

Honorary Secretary.

JOHN H. HARRIS,

Parliamentary Secretary.

Denison House,

Vauxhall Bridge Road,

London, S.W.1.

6 & 7 Victoria, c. 98.

AN ACT FOR THE MORE EFFECTUAL SUPPRESSION OF THE SLAVE TRADE.
24th August, 1843.

(Recital of 5 Geo. 4, c. 113, s. 2). And whereas it is expedient that from and after the commencement of this Act the provisions of the said Act hereinbefore recited shall be deemed to apply to, and extend to render unlawful, and to prohibit, the several Acts, matters and things therein mentioned when committed by British subjects in foreign countries and settlements not belonging to the British crown, in like manner and to all intents and purposes as if the same were done or committed by such persons within the British dominions, colonies, or settlements; and it is expedient that further provisions should be made for the more effectual suppression of the slave trade, and of certain practices tending to promote and encourage it:

(1) All the provisions of the Slave Trade Act, 1824, hereinbefore recited and of this present Act shall be deemed to extend and apply to British subjects wheresoever residing or being, and whether within the dominions of the British crown or of any foreign country; and all the several matters and things prohibited by the Slave Trade Act, 1824, or by this present Act, when committed by British subjects, whether within the dominions of the British crown or in any foreign country . . . shall be deemed and taken to be offences committed against the said several Acts respectively and shall be dealt with and punished accordingly: Provided nevertheless, that nothing herein contained shall repeal or alter any of the provisions of the said Act.

(S. 2 rep. 54 & 55 Vict. c. 67. S. 3 rep. 36 & 37 Vict. c. 88, s. 30).

(4) (Recital as to insufficiency of Acts for abolition of slave trade out of the United Kingdom.) In all cases of indictment or information laid or exhibited in the Court of Queen's Bench for misdemeanours or offences committed against the said Acts or against this present Act in any places out of the United Kingdom, and within any British colony, settlement, plantation, or territory, it shall and may be lawful for her Majesty's said court, upon motion to be made on behalf of the prosecutor or defendant, to award a writ or writs of mandamus, requiring the chief justice or other chief judicial officer in such colony, settlement, plantation, or territory, who are hereby respectively authorised and required accordingly, to hold a court, with all convenient speed, for the examination of witnesses and receiving other proofs concerning the matters charged in such indictments or informations respectively, and in the meantime to cause public notice to be given of the holding of such courts, and summonses to be issued for the attendance of witnesses and of agents and counsel of the parties; and such examinations as aforesaid shall be then and there openly and publicly taken in the said court viva voce, upon the respective oaths of the persons examined, and be reduced to writing, and be sent to her Majesty in her Court of Queen's Bench (in manner set forth and prescribed in the East India Company Act, 1772); and such depositions being duly taken and returned according to the true intent and meaning of this Act, shall be allowed and read, and shall be deemed as good and competent evidence as if such witnesses had been present and sworn and examined viva voce at any trial for such misdemeanours and offences as aforesaid in her Majesty's said Court of Queen's Bench, any law or usage to the contrary notwithstanding.

(SS. 5, 6, rep. 54 & 55, Vict. c. 67. S. 7 rep. 37 & 38 Vict. c. 96).

ANTI-SLAVERY AND ABORIGINES PROTECTION SOCIETY.

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